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ONLINE
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One of the nation's oldest publishers of magazine and book indexes unveiled a new service Monday that puts its huge database at the fingertips of computer owners across the country.

The H.W. Wilson Co., an 86-year-old New York City company that publishes the familiar Readers Guide to Periodical Literature and more than a dozen other indexes to source publications, officially begins its Wilsonline service Thursday.

The new online information retrieval system, which connects computer owners to the Wilson database via telephone much like the better known Lexis-Nexis service, features current information that is not available in the print indexes for several months.

''It is two to three to four months ahead of the indexes,'' said John Regazzi, vice president and director of computer services for Wilson.

Wilsonline offers customers, who pay a sliding scale depending on their size and subscription to other Wilson products, data on more than 3,000 periodicals and 500,000 books.

The system, which has been tested at 16 libraries over the past 12 months, is relatively free of complex computer jargon and has a simple to use format.

''It's available to anyone and everyone,'' said Frank W. Miller, another Wilson vice president.

''Wilson customers simply require the most accurate data possible, and we make every effort to meet their needs and expectation,'' Miller said. ''We are confident that students, researchers and librarians will rely upon Wilson indexes online, just as users have done with the printed indexes since the turn of the century.''

Miller, however, added that the company intends to continue producing the printed indexes that have been tapped for research informaton by students and researchers since H.W. Wilson's inception in 1898.

In addition to school and public libraries, there is interest in Wilsonline from corporate and government information operations.

The Central Intelligence Agency, the Bank of America, the departments of Justice and Commerce, Stanford University and Ford Motor Co. were among dozens of companies and institutions that sent representatives to look over the new product at the start of the Online '84 Conference and Exposition.

The three-day conference provides a showcase for the wide range of companies offering database information services to the public. Just a few of the databases now being marketed offer business reports and government filings, electronic yellow pages, psychological abstracts, medical and legal information and newspaper-text services.